

# ALABAMAARTS

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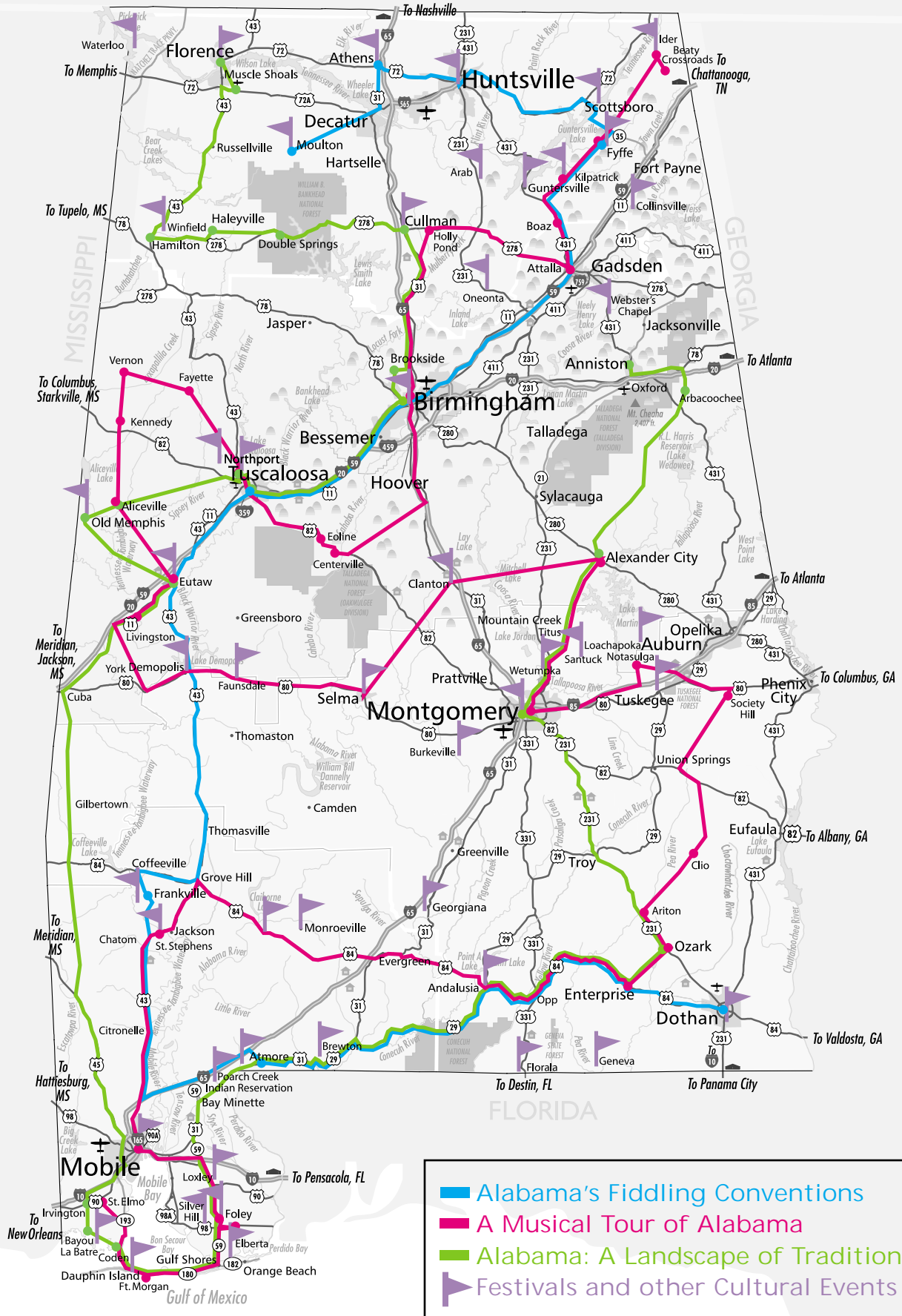
On the Cover: Digital montage using two quilts by Flavin Glover, "Canterbury" and "Inside Passage." Used with permission of the artist.



Flavin Glover, a quilt designer and teacher, lives in Auburn, Alabama. She holds a degree in Clothing, Textiles and Related Arts from Auburn University, but her first introduction to quilt making came in the mid-1950's playing under a quilt frame while her mother, Nonnie Hudson Williams, and neighbors were quilting to raise funds for the local school's PTA. As her experience grew, Flavin realized Log Cabin patchwork could become a design foundation that offered versatile pattern options. Today, her trademark, innovative Log Cabin and geometric patchwork quilts, inspired from landscapes and architecture, are composed of many fabrics in vibrant colors.

Flavin's patchwork quilts and original wearable fashions have been exhibited and published extensively since 1979. Her quilt "Row Houses" was selected one of the 100 Best American Quilts of the 20th Century. Her 2003 book *"A New Look at Log Cabin Quilts"* (C&T Publishing) is only one of the many publications featuring her works. She gives lectures and workshops throughout the United States.

# TENNESSEE



# FOLKLIFE TRAILS:

## Reflecting the State's Population and Rich Culture

by Al Head

The Spring/Summer edition of Alabama Arts is devoted to a journey down a few of the many folklife trails in a state known internationally for the richness of its folk traditions, communities and artists. In a time of technological advances, rapidly changing landscapes, demographic shifts and an ever pervasive "popular culture", Alabama is a state reflective of a merging of folkways from old and new populations. But, as is the case with a number of the state's more unique cultural resources, the "real thing" can sometimes be hard to find. We hope this publication, devoted to Alabama's folklife, will pave the way to some expanded awareness and exciting adventures found on the state's highways and by-ways.

The State Council on the Arts identified the importance of Alabama's folklife back in the early days of the agency's formation. Supporting folk artists and folklife projects has long been a high priority of the Council. After the Council was established in 1966, one of the first "program coordinator" positions added to the staff was in the area of folk art. There was much work to be done and great progress was made with initiating support for programs ranging from Sacred Harp singers to traditional potters. In 1990 the Council, with assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts, created a programming arm, or division of the agency known as the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture. The Center has been spotlighted as a national model with respect to state arts agencies support for folklife programming. In the Council's current long-range plan special emphasis is given to preserving and presenting folk traditions. The plan document states, "The unique folk expressions of Alabama, a product both of isolation and a mixture of influences, reflect the state's diverse population and symbolize its rich culture. Tradition-based songs, stories, dances, and crafts truly represent the art of the people."

The Council believes strongly in nurturing folklife as a matter of state policy and as a means of preserving and enhancing the quality of the entire state's population.

Through the text and images of this "folklife trails" edition of Alabama Arts, we want to introduce readers to the state's unique folk environment. You will read about artists, artistic expressions, communities and regions as well as current programs. Some of the references will address the past and expressions from a colorful history. Most of the narrative, however, talks about people and places of the present – things that can be seen or heard and places that can be visited now. Alabamians are generally proud of their heritage and tend to have their own family stories to tell and traditions to share. Many have grown up with folk traditions all around them. While this exposure may be prevalent, we too often take the significance of folk culture for granted and feel this "old stuff" is something to be left behind as we become more educated and progressive-minded. We strongly urge Alabamians not to go down that road of thinking. A deepening of appreciation for one's own culture as well as that of others is not only mind-broadening but an enjoyable journey involving both people and places. We hope this issue will help in that endeavor for the home-folks wanting to rediscover Alabama's cultural treasures and those curious "outsiders" wanting to experience the "real thing" for the first time. ■

*Al Head is the  
Executive Director  
of the Alabama State  
Council on the Arts.*



# A L A B A M A

Alabama is one of the most diverse environments in the United States composed of mountains, prairie, delta wetlands, and beaches. Along with a treasure trove of plant varieties and animal species is also a rich and complex cultural landscape. The cultural practices, including art, that are rooted in community are folk traditions and are an important part of this landscape of human activity. The connection between culture (learned behavior), art, and place can be seen along the roads of Alabama if you just know how to look. In this article, we will discuss the nature of folk traditions, where they are found, and how one can experience them.

## FOLK ART TRADITIONS

Folk traditions are, by definition, a product of community. The folk process of acquiring knowledge is direct, informal exposure to a way of doing things outside of an academic setting. This can occur on the job, in the family or in a congregation. This method of learning "the way things should be done" reflects a community consensus of opinion and shared aesthetic that differs between communities, ethnicities, occupations, religious groups, and regions. This timeless educational process was in place long before writing and was the first mechanism for perpetuating culture. Wherever people live

or work together, the folk process of learning is in operation, even in this age of television and the Internet. All people have folk culture whether they farm, cut pulp wood or are CEOs.

The defining characteristics of folk art are the process of learning it and how it reflects a community's aesthetics. Within these boundaries, the skill and idiosyncrasies of folk practitioners can vary. "Folk art" as it is used here is not synonymous with the art style also known as "self-taught," "outsider," or "primitive." Instead, this definition of "folk" is based on process and not a subjective formal analysis. Folk artists are highly trained in a manner that earns them the designation "folk." At some point in their lives, folk artists learned at the side of more accomplished practitioners who taught "correct" technique and a community aesthetic. Their work or performance ranges from outstanding to ungainly but these physical characteristics do not determine their inclusion or exclusion as a representative of a folk tradition.

## DECODING THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Throughout Alabama, the landscape is covered with rich layers of cultural information. Old cemeteries, stage coach roads that now



Photo by Joey Brackner

*Some early folk traditions such as the Indian's use of gourd martin houses are tied to the environment.*

run across cow pastures, log dogtrot houses that have been clap-boarded over, these are the fabric of our past as it exists in the present. Such artifacts are ideas shaped from wood, metal, clay or stone and can be studied to understand how the culture of a region developed. This material culture is a text with vocabulary and syntax that with a little effort one can interpret. The state's steel mills, farmsteads, WPA bridges and Indian mound sites tell part of the story of Alabama. This landscape is not static but dynamic, being continually reworked, reflecting the cultural practices of its inhabitants.

Like the natural environment, some of these resources are endangered including a rich variety of vernacular architecture. Vernacular

# *A Landscape of Traditions*

by Joey Brackner

or folk architecture, a symbol of local utility and aesthetic, tells us much about our heritage as Southerners and the formation and diversity of Alabama folk culture. In the story of the dogtrot house, we glimpse the folk process at work. According to folklorist Henry Glassie, this architectural form was developed in the late eighteenth century in the southern Tennessee Valley with a technology (log construction) from Scandinavia and Germany, traditional English design and the demands of a warmer southern frontier. The dogtrot is an English "hall and parlor" house made, in frontier times, from logs with the central hallway left open as a breezeway or "dogtrot." Because the effective length of a useable log is from 24-30 feet, joining two one-room log cabins under one roof with a wide, central, open breezeway was an ingenious solution for expanding a dwelling.

The marriage of different ethnic traditions tempered by practical concerns determined how our Southern culture developed. As Southerners, we often think of our region as more homogenous and less diverse than other parts of the country. We forget that during the first three centuries after Columbus' voyages, the American South was the most multi-cultural society in what is now the United States. This early diversity set a blueprint for cultural development. Picture an 1850's farm in Alabama: the dogtrot,

a frontier innovation with European origins with a garden growing okra or sweet potatoes imported from Africa; along a rail fence grows a Lady Banks rose, brought to America from China via England, and overhead an American Indian style gourd tree full of purple martins eating pest insects and keeping crows and hawks away from the farmstead. To view our folk cultural heritage as simple is erroneous and denies an opportunity to understand how we came to be the way we are.

The settlement pattern of

Alabama during the early nineteenth century determined regional differences within the state. Topography and the disposition of the state's mountains and rivers dictated that the northwestern one third of the state of Alabama was settled primarily by people from Virginia and Tennessee. To the south and south-east of Alabama's mountains were the routes that brought families from Georgia and the Carolinas. People from all regions of the South and North, as well as Europe came into the port of Mobile. Africans and

African Americans were in this mix of early Alabamians. All of these cultural groups brought in their own traditions and borrowed some from the indigenous population of Indians. Many early practices established during this period are those that modern Americans most easily identify as Southern folk traditions. Sacred Harp singing, Mardi Gras, family-run pottery shops, fiddle music, spirituals, and white oak basket making all date from the time of early statehood and are still practiced today.

*A jester rides atop a Knights of Revelry float at Mobile's Madi Gras.*



Photo by Joey Brackner

***But because folk art is a part of a community and not designed as a tourist attraction, it is not always accessible to the casual visitor.***

During the industrialization period of Alabama history, after the Civil War, populations of eastern and southern Europeans came to the state, bringing with them many ethnic groups and new religious denominations. Orthodox Christians and a new population of Catholics and Jews came into the state. There is even a small Rom (Gypsy) population in Alabama. The traditions of these people were layered on top of

and mingled with earlier Alabama folk traditions. Most recently, cultural groups such as Asians, Latinos, and Mennonites have continued to add customs to Alabama's landscape.

If one travels through Alabama's different communities, one might encounter art traditions in social context. But because folk art is a part of a community and not designed as a tourist attraction,

it is not always accessible to the casual visitor.

## SACRED HARP SINGING

Many consider Sacred Harp singing (also called shape note singing) as the flagship of Alabama folk art traditions. It displays the dynamics of many folk traditions. It was born within a folk community, in this case a religious group; developed ethnic and regional styles or variations; and changed over time.

Sacred Harp singing entered the state during the 1830s during a period of mass migration known as "Alabama Fever." Available land wrested from American Indians along with a gold rush persuaded great numbers of settlers to move into Alabama. The majority of these émigrés were Baptists and Methodists whose forefathers were dissenters from the Anglican Church. At this time, these denominations were developing a method of hymn singing derived from the New England tradition of singing masters and singing schools. They sung the hymns of late 18th Century writers such as Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley to a wide variety of tunes. The 1844 publication of William Walker's *The Sacred Harp* documented the repertory of that period and also gave this singing tradition its name.

Alabamians have clung to Sacred Harp singing with a tenacity unseen in other parts of the South. After the segregation of worship following the Civil War and emanci-



Photo by Joey Brackner

*The Russian Orthodox Church of Brookside was established by eastern Europeans who came to work in local coal mines in the late 19th Century. Brookside is located near Hwy 78, just NW of Birmingham.*



*The annual Rotunda Singing at the Alabama State Capitol is held the Saturday before the first Sunday in February.*

pation, African American singers formed their own singing conventions. In Ozark, Alabama they published their own hymnbook, *The Colored Sacred Harp* (1934). Throughout the state, regional styles and differing preferences in hymnbooks evolved.

The Denson family moved into Alabama in 1839 and eventually settled in Winston County in 1896. One hymn authored by Seaborn Denson, named after the gold rush community of "Arbacoochee" in Cleburne County, recalls his family's entry into the state. The Denson Revision of *The Sacred Harp* was published in Haleyville in 1936. It was begun by patriarchs Seaborn M. and Thomas J. Denson and completed after their deaths by Thomas J.'s son Paine Denson. The hymnbook is an example of their

musical and organizational abilities and determination to keep this music alive. In 1941, a memorable group of recordings, organized by Paine Denson, were made for the Library of Congress by John and Alan Lomax. The Densons were instrumental in teaching hundreds of singing schools throughout the South. A monument erected at the Winston County courthouse at Double Springs, Alabama commemorates their contribution to Sacred Harp and Alabama culture.

Today, the Sacred Harp tradition is accessible to the public through well-publicized singings, CDs and films. The National Sacred Harp Singing Convention is held annually in Birmingham during the week before Father's Day. This major singing attracts singers from all over the United States indicative of the nationwide revival of Sacred Harp

music. It is not uncommon to find visitors from Minnesota or California at a small-town Sacred Harp singing in Alabama. The community of Sacred Harp singers is now expanding beyond the local to the national. Alabama Sacred Harp singers such as David Ivey and Jeff Sheppard have devised modern techniques for teaching the next generation of singers. Instead of old fashioned summer singing schools, they produce Camp Fasola, held each June at Camp Lee near Anniston. Camp Fasola uses the format of a summer camp retreat where young students and their parents can spend a week of Sacred Harp instruction. The state of Alabama sponsors two singings commemorating the four shape note hymnals published in the state. The annual Capitol Rotunda Singing is held on the Saturday



before the first Sunday in February in the State Capitol. Montgomery's St. John's Episcopal Church is the location of a summer singing held on the third Thursday of July.

For more information about Sacred Harp singing and associated events, go to [www.fasola.org](http://www.fasola.org). Documentary recordings of Sacred Harp can be found at [www.alabamafolklife.org](http://www.alabamafolklife.org) and the documentary film "Sweet is the Day" can be seen at [www.folkstreams.net](http://www.folkstreams.net).

## THE BLUES

In 1912, Florence native W. C. Handy published the "Memphis Blues." This along with his later works such as the "St. Louis Blues" and "Beale St. Blues" helped establish a vernacular music genre within popular American culture. For this, he is known as the "Father of the Blues". The Blues are alive and well in Alabama especially in the rural areas of west Alabama.

Pickens County bluesman Willie King was born in 1943 and learned to play the blues when he was eight years old. "I would get old bailing wire and wrap around old broomstick. That was my guitar," he said. "The blues was sent down for oppressed people to ease their mind, not just for music, the love that goes along with it. The blues have worked miracles for me and many people."

"I am thankful for what impact the blues have on the younger generations. A gentleman named Travis Hodges, sixteen years old, is

Photo by Carol P. Zippert



*Willie King at Eutaw's Black Belt Folk Roots Festival, held annually in August.*

taking the blues on. Travis has trained two young men to play instruments and sing the blues. Travis is in process of starting his on band putting his best foot forward ready for the future generation. I recall the first time Travis saw me perform four years ago. Travis walked up to me introduced himself and told me he wanted to play the blues.

I took Travis under my wings he was a fast learner he was determined he would play the blues someday."

Travis is now playing the blues with Willie King. King says the blues will always be a part of his life. "Through my struggle of ups and downs, I will never depart from the blues for all the silver and gold in the world. The blues have healed me spiritually and mentally when I am feeling down the blues gives me hope."

Willie King and other blues artists from the Black Belt area of Alabama can be seen performing in festivals throughout the state. The Black Belt Folk Roots Festival in Eutaw presents Willie each year on the weekend before Labor Day weekend. Every June, Willie produces his own festival called the Freedom Creek Blues Festival in his home-



*Vera Davis of Edwin (Henry County) keeps her traditional dirt yard swept clean of all debris and vegetation.*

Photo by Steve Graubeger



## ***Blues and other African American music styles have greatly influenced the music of white Americans.***

town of Old Memphis, Alabama near Aliceville. For the festival's exact date and directions to Old Memphis, go to: [www.alabamablues.org](http://www.alabamablues.org).

Blues and other African American music styles have greatly influenced the music of white Americans. In 1938, Hank Williams made his public debut singing "WPA Blues" at the Empire Theatre in Montgomery. In 1949, Hank Williams' "Lovesick Blues" smashed the charts giving national attention to this young South Alabama musician. Williams, whose musical style was greatly influenced by African-American musicians such as Rufus Payne, would eventually be known as the father of modern country music but his influence would reach far beyond that genre. The grave of Hank Williams at Oakwood Cemetery is one of the most visited spots in Alabama. Oakwood Cemetery Annex is located off East Jefferson near downtown Montgomery.

More recently, this blend of musical styles has been championed by the world famous recording community of Muscle Shoals. Here a sound developed when local white studio bands played backup to R&B artists. The Muscle Shoals sound, a toe tapping rhythm and blues variant, was sought after by many international music figures who came and recorded there.

### **FOLK ENVIRONMENTS**

Highly decorated yards and gardens are a Southern tradition.



Photo by Joey Brackner

*Ave Maria Grotto is located on Highway 278, just east of Cullman.*

Before the advent of grass seeding and the proliferation of air-conditioning units, people spent a lot of time outside of the house and yards were a functioning part of the household. People sometimes prepared and cooked food outside and they also swept the yards which they decorated with plants and painted trees. Many lined their yards and pathways with colorful bottles or put them on bottle trees. Sometimes people would build whirligigs and other decorative structures. A hint of these traditions remains today. People who carry this practice to an extreme degree are often described as building yard shows or folk art environments.

On first glance, Cullman's Ave Maria Grotto would seem to be the mother of all yard shows. This vast

area of miniature concrete sculptures is adjacent to St. Bernard's Benedictine College. In 1918, Brother Joseph Zoetl, a Benedictine monk from Bavaria constructed a miniature church of concrete at St. Bernard's Abbey in Cullman. For the next 40 years, this partially disabled clergyman would build Ave Maria Grotto an impressive example of the Benedictine grotto tradition. Catholic clergy and others have built decorative grottos as environments for religious contemplation throughout the world.

### **CRAFT TRADITIONS**

Craft traditions, such as tatting, basketry, and quilting, were once practiced by a large portion of the population and were primarily for

family consumption. Today, there are still many practitioners of these traditions, but their art is not always apparent to those traveling the back roads of the state. Some local community centers like the RSVP center in Safford on Hwy. 5 in western Dallas County sell the work of local artists. But one is more likely to encounter Alabama traditional craft artists at one of the many local festivals. The most widely known of these festivals is the Kentuck Festival, first held in 1971. Since then, the popular outdoor crafts festival quickly became an important regional venue for visual artists including traditional folk artists. The Kentuck Festival is produced each September in Northport, just west of Tuscaloosa off Highway 82. For more information, go to [www.kentuck.org](http://www.kentuck.org).

Another good presentation of traditional crafts can be seen at the Black Belt Folk Roots Festival. This event began in 1976 and is still produced annually in Eutaw which is located just off Interstate 56 between Tuscaloosa and Meridian, Mississippi. The festival presents traditional craft and music artists from a multi-county area of west Alabama and east Mississippi. The Black Belt Folk Roots Festival is one of the longest running community-based folk festivals in the South and is held the weekend before Labor Day.



Photo by Anne Kinzey

*An Asian garden in Mobile County: Hun Hem grows pumpkins used in traditional Cambodian cuisine.*

## NEW IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR TRADITIONS

The most recent layers in Alabama's cultural stratigraphy have been added during the last thirty years as new immigrants have brought their traditions to Alabama. Recently, Latinos mostly from Mexico and Central America have come to Alabama.

An Asian population of Cambodians, Vietnamese and Laotians came to southern Mobile County and settled in the communities of Bayou La Batre, Irvington and Coden. This migration occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as refugees were resettled after the end of the Vietnam War. This population has become involved in the fishing industry in this area.

Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico and Central America and the Caribbean have settled throughout Alabama in more recent years. They have become involved in several industries, especially in north Alabama. Well-liveried soccer teams hold tournaments in communities once dominated by the gridiron. Some communities celebrate Christmas Posadas, Cinco de Mayo, and have produced bands of Mariachi musicians.

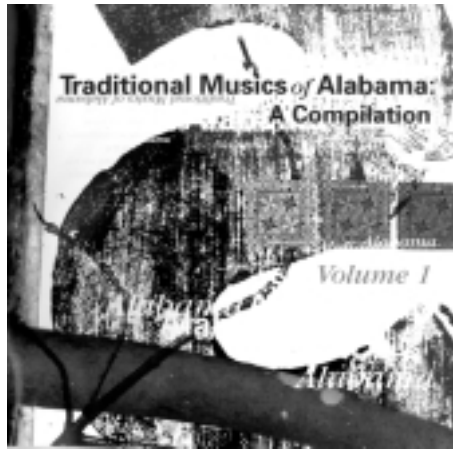
The language barrier of these groups has inhibited the quick integration of their traditions into the local culture.

Nevertheless, the folk process continues balancing the retention of cultural practice within groups with acculturation in a new land. And presence of these new Alabamians can be seen in the numerous Asian and Hispanic restaurants and stores. Throughout Alabama, Asian markets and restaurants, *tiendas*, and *taquerias* are a reflection of new tastes and customs. Through the years these populations and their traditions will make a mark on the ever changing cultural landscape of Alabama. ■

*Joey Brackner is the Folklife Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts.*

# A Musical Tour of Alabama

by Steve Grauberger



CD Recording: Traditional Music of Alabama, Volume 1.

A journey on Alabama's rolling country roads unveils lush landscapes, dotted with fish ponds and rivers, hills and flats, pine and hardwood forests. During a springtime journey, sweet smelling, purple-blossomed wisteria and flowering kudzu climbs over time-weathered obstructions near freshly plowed fields. For many Alabamians, aesthetic aspects of Alabama scenery can convey fond remembrances of past experiences. Similar memories can trigger a song or melody in one's mind, unforgettable songs like "The Old Ship of Zion" out of the *Sacred Harp* songbook, the old fiddle tune "Soldier's Joy," a blues melody or a beloved gospel tune such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

This article takes a winding journey on the road into Alabama's musical heritage, which has passed from generation to generation, and includes the musical traditions of new immigrant cultures in the state. The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture maintains an ongoing project of collecting and presenting traditional music through a variety of CD productions and associated publications. The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture (ACTC), a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) works cooperatively with the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA) to produce educational folklife products to educate as well as entertain the public.

Traditional music of Alabama means different things to different people. To many, the diversity of traditional music in Alabama is essentially black and white, dividing musical culture simply along ethnic lines. But there are many cultural crosscurrents and subtle variations within varied genres and sub-genres of heritage music, especially as populations expand and inspire interaction and imitation as well as new ethnic groups moving into the state creating new traditions.

The primary music recording project for the Center for Traditional Culture is an ongoing CD series called *Traditional Musics of Alabama* produced in a sequence of volumes. So far three volumes of the series are published.

Volume 1: *Traditional Musics of Alabama: A Compilation* has 30 featured tracks that present a wide overview of various types of music performances of people living throughout Alabama.

Volume 2: *Traditional Musics of Alabama: African American Seven Shapenote Singing* is a genre specific production covering populations throughout Alabama that still keep seven shapenote convention style singing alive.

Volume 3: *Traditional Musics of Alabama: 2002 National Sacred Harp Singing Convention* presents 32 selections taken from a day's recording at the National Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Birmingham.

Volume 4: *Traditional Musics of Alabama: Wiregrass Notes Revisited* planned but not yet released, will be a reissue of the 1980 LP recording with additional recorded material digitally mastered from the original master tapes.

From one corner of the state to the other the Center is making a concerted effort to find and record people who keep traditional musical heritage alive in Alabama. In this article the Vol. 1, *Traditional Musics of Alabama: A Compilation*, is used as a musical travel guide to the state.

## NORTHEAST ALABAMA

This journey starts in the northeastern corner of Alabama. Driving from Chattanooga south on I-59, Lookout Mountain is on the left and Sand Mountain is on the right. Together these geological features make up a large portion of northeastern Alabama running from the northern Alabama border toward Birmingham, taking up most of DeKalb, and Jackson counties and smaller parts of Marshall, Blount, and Etowah counties.

***It is said on Sand Mountain that if you shake any tree a gospel quartet will fall out.***

Taking DeKalb County Road 140 off I-59 go to AL Hwy 75 heading southeast until Beaty Crossroads, head north on AL Hwy 117 two miles to Ider, near the DeKalb/Jackson County border, the first stop on this trip.

Many good musicians have come from the Sand Mountain area including country music stars the Louvin Brothers and the Maddox Brothers and Rose (Maddox). Noah Lacy (1908 - 1993) originally from Jackson County was well known in and around Ider. Lacy exemplified the musical heritage of his native Sand Mountain as both an old-time fiddler and a Sacred Harp singer. Born in Jackson County to a family of musicians, Mr. Lacy took up the fiddle at age 15, learning to play by watching and listening to his father, uncle and older brother. On the *Volume 1* CD he plays the fiddle tune "Hen Cackle." Lacy grew up in the 1920s and '30s in the era of string bands. Originally he patterned his musical style after Clayton McMichen and Lowe Stokes of the Skillet Lickers, a band popular at the time of early county music recordings. Lacy and his band played for dances in the homes of friends and neighbors. He also won many fiddle contests in the region. In 1991, he received the State Arts Council's highest honor for the traditional arts, the Alabama Folk Heritage Award.

Getting back on AL Hwy 75 heading south, the next stop is Fyffe, just south of Rainsville.

It is said on Sand Mountain that if you shake any tree a gospel quartet will fall out. Included on the *Volume 1* CD is a southern gospel quartet the Melody Men, headed up by Al Malone, a resident of Lebanon, Alabama. The group, however, was known on Garrison Keillor's radio program, *A Prairie Home Companion*, as originating in the town of Fyffe when they won the annual contest of musicians from towns under populations of 100. The group began singing together in 1994, performing small concerts and making appearances in area churches and schools, but, have since disbanded.

On the recording they perform a seven-shapenote convention song "My Heavy Burdens Have Rolled away" published by Stamps-Baxter. The group sings in a fashion of an old-style Southern Gospel quartet reminiscent of the John Daniel Quartet, which also originated in Sand Mountain



Photo by Kim Appel

*The late Noah Lacy was a fiddler and Sacred Harp singer from Ider.*

and became nationally known in the 1940s and 50s.

Heading southwest again on AL Hwy 75 take a left turn on AL Hwy 68 to the intersection of Hwy 168, this is the town of Kilpatrick near Boaz.

This is the home of Gary Waldrep who was raised on the musical traditions of Sand Mountain, including banjo playing, fiddling and close harmony singing. Gary grew up on an eighty-acre family farm at the edge of DeKalb County. On the CD he plays his arrangement of "Goin' on

the Mountain" using an old-style banjo picking technique called claw-hammer or "rapping" in an Alabama context.

From Kilpatrick, drive southwest on Hwy 168 to US Hwy 431 (Boaz, AL) then south down the mountain into the city of Gadsden home of legendary gospel singers Vestal and Happy Goodman and blues harmonica master Jerry McCain.

From Gadsden heading northwest on US Hwy 278 one travels through Etowah, Blount and into Cullman County and into the small town of Holly Pond, probably known best as the home town of Governor Guy Hunt. The Dixie Bluegrass Band is

Photo by Steve Graubeger



*Gary Waldrep at Kiwanis Park in Montgomery.*

a prize-winning group known for good fiddling and smooth harmony singing. Among its repertoire are bluegrass favorites, gospel, folk ballads, old-time fiddle and banjo tunes and buckdancing. On Volume 1 they play a beautiful instrumental rendition of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The group is made up of Betty Ray and husband, Dwight, from Holly Pond and David Black, Junior Saint, and Wayne Burgette from Arab. Betty is the daughter of fiddler/instrument-maker Arlin Moon of Holly Pond. Tina Ray Miller, Betty and Dwight's daughter played fiddle with them for this performance. Tina, a champion fiddler, who has been playing since she was 6 years old,

learned from her grandfather, Arlin Moon. Each year at the end of August Betty and Dwight and the town of Holly Pond sponsor the Dixie Bluegrass Festival.

In nearby Arab, the Long Branch Opry is a regular venue for bluegrass and bluegrass gospel performances.

Photo by Barbara Lau



*Betty Moon Ray, Tina Ray Miller and Dwight Ray of the Dixie Bluegrass Band.*



Photo by Steve Graubeger

*The house band performs at the Long Branch Opry in Arab.*



*The Birmingham Sunlights perform in the a cappella gospel singing tradition.*

"gandy dancers," John Mealing and Cornelius Wright, Jr. of Birmingham became recipients of the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowship award, the government's highest honor in folk and traditional arts. On *Volume 1*, John Mealing performs "I Got a Girl in the White Folks' Yard" recorded in

## BIRMINGHAM

From Holly Pond one might drive south on AL Hwy 91 to Hanceville and then on to Birmingham by taking US Hwy 31. Birmingham is represented on *Volume 1* with two unique recordings, performed by The Birmingham Sunlights and railroad work song caller John Mealing.

The Birmingham Sunlights developed their four-part *a cappella* style within the Church of Christ, where no musical instruments are permitted during services. Three brothers, James, Barry and Steve Taylor founded the group and are joined by Reginald Speights, Wayne Williams, and Bill Graves. Upon becoming aware of the rich Jefferson County gospel quartet tradition they sought training from senior quartets, such as the Sterling Jubilees. On the CD they sing "Angels Watching Over Me," a traditional song and original arrangement by the Birmingham Sunlights.

In 1996 African-American railroad worksong singers, also known as

1988. It took a skilled, sensitive caller to raise the right chant to fit the task at hand and the mood of the men. Using a melodic style typical of the blues, each caller had his own signature. The effectiveness of a caller has been compared to how a preacher can move a congregation.



Photo by Joey Brackner

*Arthur James and other gandy dancers perform railroad workcalls in Calera (1988).*

From Birmingham the next leg of this trip is south on I-65 to Calera and then southwest on AL Hwy 25 to Centreville. Just north of Centreville on US Hwy 82 and a few miles northeast of the highway in the Eoline community is the location of Little Hope Primitive Baptist Church, the spiritual center of Christian Harmony seven shapenote singing in Alabama and homeplace of the Deason Family. On the CD is a recording by the late Don Smith, Primitive Baptist elder, titled "Grace 'Tis a Charming Sound." He lined out the hymn in a manner similar to that of his grandfather. Singing after each lined phrase are members of the Deason family present in 1994 during the annual Deason family reunion and Christian Harmony singing convention.



## WEST ALABAMA

Getting back on US 82 west one passes through Tuscaloosa on to AL Hwy 171 north going through Fayette and once there on to AL Hwy 18 east to the town of Vernon in Lamar County. The Lamar County area is represented in four examples found on Vol 1. The Stripling Brothers performing "Wolves a Howling", Russell Johnson singing "Johnson's Old Grey Mule" accompanied by Floyd Bryant on guitar, and southern gospel group Notes and Strings performing "Getting Ready to Leave This World" and Corly Pennington singing "Ra Ta Tum De Dum."

Charlie Stripling was born in 1896 near Kennedy, just south of Vernon, Alabama. A fine fiddler, he with his brother Ira were early commercial recording artists. Charlie won many local fiddling contests during his career and continued to play regularly with his family and others at various community functions until the 1950s.

Russell Johnson the singer of the CD musical example "Johnson's Old Grey Mule" had known this song since early 1900s. He believes he learned it from a recording of Gid Tanner's Skillet Lickers Band. Fiddler J.C. Brock, born in 1918 in the Mt. Vernon Community in Lamar County, Alabama plays accompaniment with Maurice Langley on guitar. He learned to play from renowned fiddler Charlie Stripling.

The Notes and Strings gospel group includes lead singer, Jack Rushing with other singers, Russell Johnson, Floyd and Patschal Bryant, J.C. Brock (Fiddle), Maurice Langley (Guitar), Lily Johnson Ashcraft (Electric Keyboard). Their musical example is "Getting Ready to Leave This World," originally a seven-shapenote convention song written by Luther Presley in 1937 and published by Stamps-Baxter. The performance was recorded by Joyce Cauthen in Vernon in 1987.

Corly Pennington, from Fernbank sang a variant of an old ballad "Gypsy Davey" recorded by Ray Browne in 1952. She was about forty years old at the time of the recording and had learned all of her songs from her father.



Photo courtesy of Robert Stripling

*Charlie Stripling is flanked on the left by the Freeman brothers of Pickens County and on the right by his brother Ira. (photo circa 1927)*

Vernon is the home of the Back Porch Opry where one can hear local country, gospel and bluegrass artists every Saturday night. These free performances are held in the Lamar Theater on the courthouse square.

Going south on AL Hwy 17 out of Vernon one passes by the Millport/Kennedy area and continues south to the town of Aliceville, county seat of Pickens County. From Aliceville the next turn is on to AL Hwy 14 towards Eutaw Alabama.

While not featured on the CD, ASCA music fellowship recipient Willie King from Aliceville and Alabama Folk Heritage Award recipient the late Bo McGee from Eutaw give testament to the strong African-American blues tradition of the Black Belt region. Each year Willie King presents the Freedom Creek Blues Festival at his family land in Old Memphis, outside of Aliceville near the Mississippi border.



Photo by Steve Graubeger

*Taylor Moe plays guitar while children dance at the annual Freedom Creek Festival, Old Memphis, Alabama.*

In Eutaw, the county seat of Greene County and the home of the annual Black Belt Folk Roots Festival, there are two representatives found on *Volume 1*, Elder James Cockrell and Luella Hatcher. Elder Fred Cockrell, the song leader on the old spiritual "Sure Been Good to Me," is the pastor of Bethlehem Primitive Baptist Church in Eutaw and the moderator of the Sispey River Primitive Baptist Association.

Luella Hatcher, originally from the Eutaw area leads a "Dr. Watts" style song on the recorded example "A Charge to Keep I Have," a hymn she learned in childhood. She was born in 1930 in West Greene, Alabama, 20 miles from Eutaw, and as a young girl she joined the Salem Primitive Baptist Church near Aliceville. There she learned to sing hymns in the "Dr. Watts" style by listening to her father, a deacon, and other men in the church.

Leaving Eutaw on either I-20 or US Hwy 11 in a southerly direction the next stop is Livingston, the county seat of Sumter County. This was the home of Ruby Pickens Tartt who located singers in the Sumter County area for John Lomax during his important documentary recordings in the 1930s and 1940s for the Library of Congress. Examples of these recordings on the compilation are:

- Track 5) "Children's Play Song" led by Maddie Mae Cole of Mt. Pile School, 10 miles south of Livingston near York in 1940.
- Track 6) "Come, Butter, Come" sung by Harriet McClintock was recorded by Lomax near Sumterville, 12 miles north of Livingston, on November 3, 1940.
- Track 7) "Cross-E Shimmy Dance Tune" performed by Tom Bell for Lomax in Livingston on November 3, 1940.

Now for a long drive east across the state, from Livingston going southeast on AL Hwy 28 to US 80 go



Photo by Anne Kinzey

*Luella Hatcher performs at the In the Spirit Concert, Gadsden, 1995.*

east to Selma then get on AL Hwy 22 in a northeasterly direction to Alexander City, going through Maplesville, and Clanton on the way.

Alexander City is where the Thomas Sisters live. They are represented on the recording with another seven shapenote convention song "What a Day of Victory" sung in quartet style. Once made up of five sisters, the group now has three members, Margie and Bernice Thomas, and Margie's daughter Phyllis. The Thomas Sisters are always in demand at choir anniversaries, and local events where gospel music is involved. The sisters grew up in a family where music was very important. Their father was an avid shape-note singer, both four-shape Sacred Harp and seven-shape convention styles. It is from their father they learned to sing many of the numerous songs they now perform. Most of the Thomas

Sisters repertory comes originally from convention singing books published by Ben Speer, James Vaughn, and Stamps-Baxter.

## MONTGOMERY

Out of Alexander City there is a nice drive on AL Hwy 259 south that eventually intersects with AL Hwy 9. Go south on Hwy 9 until US Hwy 231. Go south on Hwy 231 to Montgomery. There are two examples representing Montgomery on *Volume 1*. The song "Sweet River" was recorded at the annual Rotunda Singing, held in the beautiful rotunda of the historic Alabama State Capitol building downtown, the other from Mariachi Garibaldi.

New groups of Latin American immigrants to Alabama have recently appeared to fill various labor markets, construction, landscaping and, most notably, poultry production work. They bring their own cultural traditions and musical entertainment to dances, festivals and other cultural events. The Mariachi Garibaldi, based in Montgomery, travels all over Alabama as well as

***They bring their own cultural traditions and musical entertainment to dances, festivals and other cultural events.***

Photo by Steve Graubeger



*Mariachi Garibaldi during the Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration in Tuscaloosa.*

Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida performing its music. Everesto Hernandez, the group's leader, is a recent recipient of a Folk Art Apprenticeship grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts. On the CD compilation the band performs the song "Guadalajara."

## EAST ALABAMA

Leaving Montgomery go northeast on I-85 north until you get to AL Hwy 81, just north of Tuskegee. Keep on AL Hwy 81 north a few miles to Notasulga.

Representing this area is the Mount Hebrew Primitive Baptist Church that belongs to the Spring Hill Union Association founded in 1892. Its five churches are in the broad vicinity of Titus, Tuskegee, Notasulga, and Camp Hill, Alabama. The hymn "We Shall Sleep But Not Forever" Hymn #688 from Benjamin Lloyd's *The Primitive Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Sacred Poems*, sung by the congregation was recorded in 1997. The style in which the hymns are sung by this association is unique and beautiful. Many of their songs are first lined out by the whole congregation and sung after each spoken line.

Leaving Notasulga, take AL Hwy 81 south to US Hwy 80 going east until you reach Society Hill on the Macon County border with Lee and very near Russell County as well.

The late Albert Macon, born in 1920 in Society Hill, played a type of music he called "boogie and blues," which he learned from his father, Buster Macon, at house parties and frolics in the rural Macon County community. They played old-time, country blues tunes, such as "John Henry," and "Staggerlee," in a rousing style intended for dancing.

Albert Macon began teaching Robert Thomas to play blues guitar when Thomas, who was nine years younger than Macon, was about 15 years old. For over 40 years the two men played music together at fish fries, parties and festivals in the greater Auburn, Tuskegee, and Columbus, Georgia area. On the CD, Macon and Thomas perform an old Lightning Hopkins song "Gotta Move."

## SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

From Society Hill get on AL Hwy 51 and drive through Clayton, Clio and into Ariton. Clio is the birthplace of George Wallace and home of the annual Chittlin Festival. Ariton has the annual Catfish Festival and was home of blues musician, the late J.W. Warren who was documented on *Traditional Music of Alabama's Wiregrass* CD. This is an earlier compilation made of a 10 county area in southeast Alabama. Warren's cousin, Big Mama Thornton was also from this region of Dale County. Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" was a cover of a Big Mama Thornton song.

From Ariton take AL Hwy 123 going south to Ozark, in Dale County.

***Most singers in conventions are excellent sight readers of music and overall represent the much larger Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention that meets each year with nearly every county in Alabama represented.***

Representing Ozark on the CD are two groups. The Dale County seven shapenote singing convention sings "Look Up." The song is an example of a newly composed song sung from annual convention books, sometimes called "little books" or "new books." Most singers in conventions are excellent sight readers of music and overall represent the much larger Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention that meets each year with nearly every county in Alabama represented. This recording comes from a convention held at Pleasant Hill Methodist Church in Ozark in 1998.

The other Ozark recording on the CD is the tune "Pisgah", sung by an African-American Sacred Harp group known as the Wiregrass Singers. Southeast Alabama is known as the Wiregrass region, named for a plant once abundant in the area. One of the earliest recorded productions of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (with the University of Alabama) was a vinyl LP called *Wiregrass Notes*, produced in 1981.

Now, continue the journey west across the state by getting on AL Hwy 27 to Enterprise.

While no tracks from the CD represent Enterprise, there is a local blues musician, Little Jimmy Reed (a.k.a. Leon Atkins), who lives there. Also, one may want to see the world famous boll weevil monument in downtown Enterprise.

## SOUTHWEST ALABAMA

While not the straightest route, to go to the next location on this musical journey, take US Hwy 84 into the Piney Woods region to Grove Hill in Clarke County. From Grove Hill go south on AL Hwy 43 until you reach Washington County Rd 34 and then go west toward St. Stephens, the first territorial capitol of Alabama.

St. Stephens and the Washington County area have an interesting history of gospel music and especially that of bluegrass gospel. The Sullivan Family bluegrass band began indirectly when Enoch Sullivan's father, the Reverend Arthur Sullivan, converted after recovering from a life threatening illness. As a promise to God he began a Pentecostal ministry that included singing and



Photo by Steve Graubeger

*Margie and Enoch Sullivan at their home in St. Stephens.*

playing gospel music during services. The Rev. Sullivan with the help of his brother Jerry and with his sons Enoch and Emmet, formed the family band. Jerry and his daughter Tammy now live in Nashville and perform in their own gospel group.

On the CD, the song "Old Brush Arbor" by George Jones is sung by Enoch's wife Margie and depicts a once common practice of holding revival services in the rural countryside under structures made out of tree branches to shade the worshipers. Each May the Sullivans present Dixie Bluegrass Gospel Fest, a bluegrass gospel event near their home on the Friday and Saturday of Mother's Day weekend.

From St. Stephens get back on AL Hwy 43 into Mobile.

## MOBILE

Mobile dates back to 1702 as the earliest successful French settlement on the upper Gulf Coast. During its history, Mobile has been part of many nations, including France, Britain, and Spain. One annual event much loved by Alabamians is Mardi Gras in Mobile. Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday," refers to the Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday, the start of the penitential season of Lent in the Catholic Church calendar. Mardi Gras in Mobile developed from an Old World celebration. In Mobile, the weeks preceding Lent are marked with festivities such as private balls and public parades put on by the many Mardi Gras societies.

The Excelsior Band is considered Mobile's official Mardi Gras band. The group performs in more than a dozen parades during Mardi Gras season. According to the late James Seals, whose grandfather was a former Excelsior Band member, the group continues in its more than 110-year-old, brass band tradition by playing "Dixieland oldies and goodies" for parades, dances, funerals, building dedications, and other special occasions. John A. Pope founded the Excelsior Band in 1883 with a group of musician friends who had gathered to celebrate the birth of his son. Several original members worked for the Creole Fire Company, so they often practiced their music in a room above the fire station. On the CD they play a medley of contemporary jazz favorites.

Another track on the CD representing Mobile is the work song chant "Carry Carry" a traditional tune recorded by John A. Lomax 1937 sung by Thomas Langston, Judge Broadus, Albert Nicholson and Joe Milhouse at the State docks, Mobile, AL

From Mobile get on US Hwy 90 and turn off on US AL 31 to enjoy a leisurely drive along

the causeway between Mobile and Baldwin counties. Get on the national scenic Hwy 98 once you cross the bay and follow it to Foley AL.

Foley is represented here by The Baldwin County Polka Band, established in 1977. They formerly performed at weddings, Mayfests, Octoberfests, senior citizens centers and other Baldwin County gatherings, such as the Elberta Sausage Festival. Immigrants from Czechoslovakia came to Baldwin County in the early part of the 20th century. They brought their own cultural practices including a penchant for the European polka. Clara Prochazka, was born to Czech parents in Silverhill in 1922. After marrying the late Frank Prochazka, she began teaching their two children and others of Czech descent to perform the folk dances she had learned as a child and started a family polka band to entertain local residents. On the compilation CD The Baldwin County Polka Band performs a medley of "Red Rose Polka" and "Baby Doll Polka."

In nearby Elberta is the Baldwin County Heritage Museum at 25521 US Highway 98, which celebrates the ethnic diversity of Baldwin County.

Driving from Foley on AL Hwy 180 to Ft. Morgan is a wonderful scenic drive. Fort Morgan, a brick fort constructed between 1819 and 1834, was active during four wars; the Civil War, the Spanish-American War and World Wars I and II.

The museum offers exhibits that detail the history of the fort.

After visiting the historic fort take the Mobile Bay Ferry to Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island. Take AL Hwy 193 to AL Hwy 188 to the Irvington-Bayou la Batre highway to US Hwy 90 then a couple miles west to St. Elmo, the final stop.

Photo by Ken Reynolds



*The Baldwin County Polka Band performs at the Alabama Folklife Festival in Montgomery.*



The Alabama Folklife Association is a statewide non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote knowledge and appreciation of Alabama folklife through activities such as festivals, conferences, fieldwork, videos, recordings and publications. The Association was founded in 1980 by a group of Alabamians interested in our state's folk culture. The AFA was established "to discover, collect, publish, and thus preserve, the folklife of Alabama, and to further the understanding, appreciation, and performance of the traditional arts and crafts of the state." Since its founding, the AFA has been an active presenter of Alabama folk arts, producing documentary recordings, a scholarly journal, conferences, seminars, and creating the Alabama Folklife Festival (1989 – 1994). To further its mission, the AFA has established working relationships with the Alabama Folklife Program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Alabama Humanities Foundation, the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts and independent folklore scholars and researchers in the state. Most importantly, the AFA has established good working relationships with individual folk practitioners.

The logo of the Alabama Folklife Association is the gourd martin house, an American Indian tradition adopted by all communities within the state. This symbol, chosen for the first Alabama Folklife Festival in 1989 represents harmony with the natural environment and cultural exchange between different peoples.

For more information about the AFA and its products, go to [www.alabamafolklife.org](http://www.alabamafolklife.org).

Reagan Ngamvilay lives in St. Elmo in Mobile County where various groups of Southeast Asian immigrants have come to live, mainly Laotians, Cambodians and Vietnamese. The new populations initially found employment in the coastal seafood industry. Reagan plays the *khene* (or *kaen*), the primary instrument used in the folk music of Laos. It is a wind instrument made from bamboo canes that produce an accordion-like tone. Music performed on the *khene* accompanies singing and dancing during many Lao celebrations and ceremonies. Mr. Ngamvilay received his musical training from his uncle with whom he apprenticed for three years. On *Volume 1*, Ngamvilay and singer Khamsing Darapheth perform "Salawan" a traditional song recorded in 1991.



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Laotian khene player Reagan Ngamvilay with students.*

This ends our journey back and forth across Alabama, from Sand Mountain in the northeastern corner to St. Elmo in the southwest corner of the state. One can see that Alabama traditional music is an important element of people's lives and culture. Of course, this is only a portion of what Alabama has to offer both in scenery and traditional music. ■

*Steve Grauberger is a Folklife Specialist for the Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.*



# *Rosin Up the Bow:*

## ALABAMA'S FIDDLING CONVENTIONS

by Joyce Cauthen

**F**iddlers' conventions brightened the lives of folks in rural communities and small towns across Alabama during the Great Depression. The tradition of bringing together all the fiddlers in an area for a merry competition is an old and honored one across the South, one of the earliest being held in Virginia in 1736. Alabama surely witnessed its share of conventions

during pioneer days but few were documented until the early 1920s, when a nationwide longing for the good old days renewed interest in fiddlers' conventions, spelling bees and other old-fashioned entertainments and brought them to the front pages of local newspapers. Fiddlers' conventions exploded in popularity in the 1930s and older fiddlers across the state have recalled times during

the Depression when they could go to a convention at a different schoolhouse in the area nearly once a week. For instance, the late Bill Harrison, a fan of old-time music, remembered conventions being held in the Limestone County schoolhouses of Elkmont, Cairo, Athens, Rockaway, Goodsprings, Cartwright, Cross Key, West Limestone and East Limestone. Buckdancer Charlie

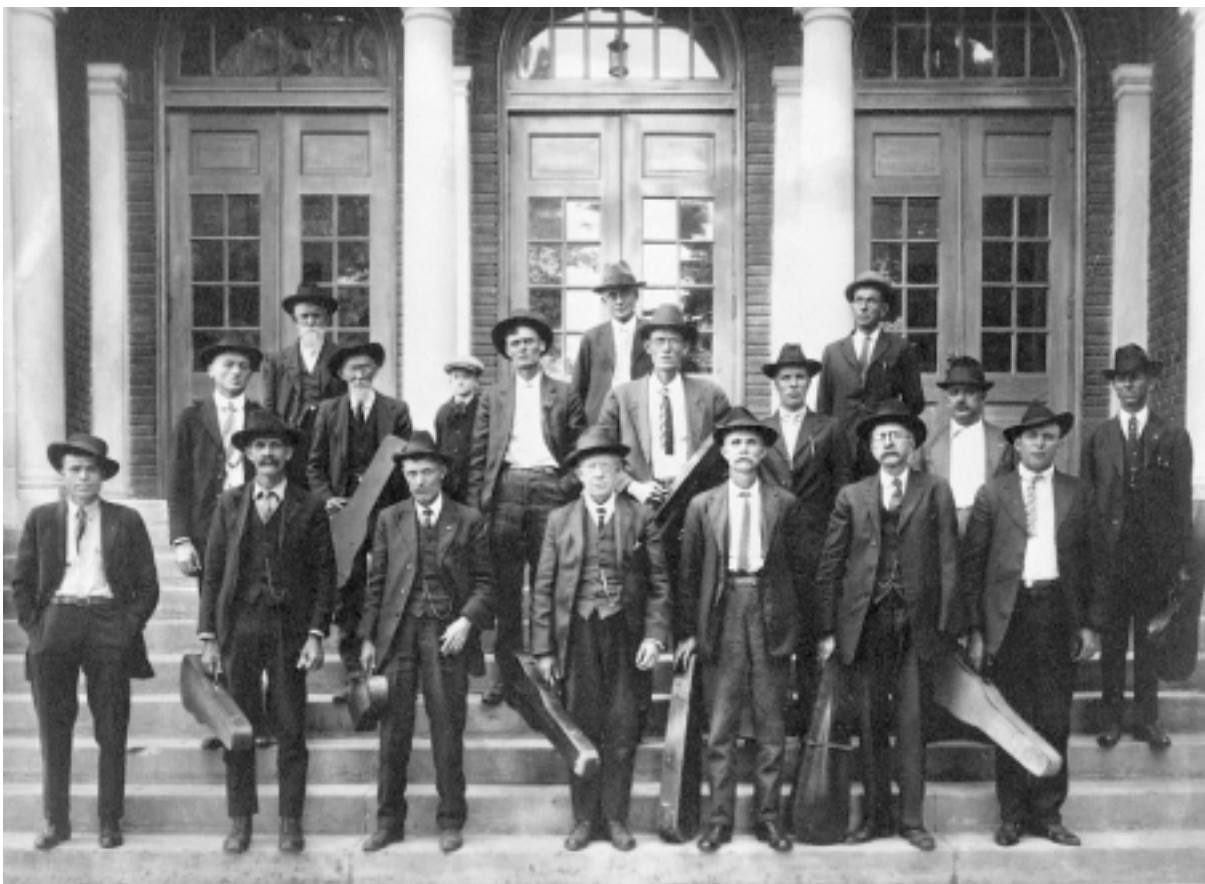


Photo courtesy of The Anniston Star

*Contestants at an early fiddlers' convention in Anniston.*

Baxter of Washington County recalled going to fiddlers' conventions in Fruitdale, McIntosh, Chatom, Mildred, and Leroy. Clarence Carpenter who fiddled at these Washington County conventions as a child regarded them as very big events since they were about the only kind of musical entertainment available in an area where even radios were rare.

Across the state, reports in the newspapers of the day show that these Saturday night events were well attended by enthusiastic audiences. Meant to be highly entertaining programs rather than serious musical competitions, they usually featured a popular citizen as Master of Ceremonies and a program of competitions involving various instruments, bands, singers, and buck dancers. Some offered contests that determined the ugliest man, the biggest liar, the best hog caller or husband-caller. Prizes were usually a small amount of cash for the first place fiddler and donated items, such as cakes, watermelons, neckties, and handkerchiefs for the rest. Judges were selected from the audience and some were known to award first place to a small child or a fiddler known to be in financial difficulty instead of to a virtuoso fiddler.

The primary goal of most conventions was to raise money for the local school. With a small admission fee of ten to twenty-five cents, organizers could raise fifty or more dollars in a night to help pay teachers' salaries, buy books for the library or

replace broken windows. But they also provided an excuse for the community to gather, a reason for fiddlers to hone their skills and an opportunity to swap tunes and techniques. Some additionally provided audiences for candidates seeking public office.

After World War II, vast changes in where and how Alabamians live and entertain themselves almost caused the extinction of fiddling and the fiddlers' convention. However one convention in Frankville has kept

Athens. A number of other conventions have been created or revived across the state—all different, all reflecting the tastes and traditions of their own communities, and all with their own ideas about the placement of an apostrophe in "fiddlers."

The Frankville Fiddler's Convention takes place each year on the third Saturday in April in a wooden schoolhouse built in 1926. The first convention was held that year to raise money to support the new school building. Sponsored by the W.N. Reynolds Masonic Lodge,



Photo by Joyce Cauthen

*The Old Frankville School (1926) is the site of the longest-running fiddlers' convention in Alabama.*

on keeping on and is still an important cultural event in Washington County. In Limestone County a revival in 1966 of the area's contest tradition has grown into the state's largest fiddlers' convention, the highly successful Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention in

the proceeds of the event still go toward maintaining what is now a historic building and the contest is still run much like it was in 1926.

The competition begins at 7:30 p.m. but the crowds pour in around 5:30, mainly from Washington County and surround-

ing Clarke, Choctaw, Baldwin, and Mobile Counties and from eastern Mississippi. A gentleman who drove there for the first time from Dothan, Alabama, was surprised at the size of the crowd, having seen so few people or houses on his drive through sparsely-populated Southwest Alabama.

Anyone who attended school in Frankville tries to come back on the third weekend in April, giving the event the feel of a school reunion. They buy plates of pit-cooked barbecue from the Masons and eat as they swap stories about the old days in Frankville. Then they hurry to the auditorium to grab a good seat, knowing there will be standing room only when the music begins. The organizers select the judges from the audience of approximately 500. The only criterion for judges is that they know something about music—either they are musicians or music teachers or they have grown up in families that play music.

The contest begins promptly at 7:30. Fiddlers are always first on the program. The audience claps along with the fiddlers on the fast numbers and cheer encouragingly as each fiddler completes his pieces. A favorite entrant is Clarence Carpenter. Born in 1927, he learned to play from his father and first entered the Frankville fiddlers' convention when he was nine years old. He recalls that the prize for first place was \$5 and second place was \$2.50, but he got a box of curly bubble gum as his prize that night. In



Photo by Joyce Cauthen

*Audience fills the auditorium for the Frankville Fiddlers' Convention.*

recent years the top prize has been \$150. Most of the other entrants are also well-known to the audience as they grew up in Washington and surrounding counties and have played at the convention many times, as have their fathers, aunts and uncles before them. Most also play at the regular musical gatherings held at volunteer fire departments in the area.

Competitions involving bluegrass bands, vocalists, buck dancers, guitarists, banjoists and mandolin players are interspersed with cake auctions and a few command performances by musicians known for their renditions of entertaining songs. None of the winners are announced until the last competitor has played, usually around midnight.

For a county with a population of 18,097 (2000)—16.7 persons per square mile—Washington County has a large number of bluegrass, country and gospel musicians, as do neigh-

boring Choctaw and Clarke Counties. Fiddler Aaron Bozeman says that it is not surprising that so many play instruments in Washington County. "We grew up hard. There wasn't any jobs except paper wood, saw mills and pea patching. As young kids we had to find ways to entertain ourselves. All we had was dirt roads—no electric lights, no radio, until after World War II. With no jobs, nowhere to go and no way to go, you just had to find some way to entertain yourself. So you hear your daddy play and you want to play. You just listen and learn from others who are playing." The area has spawned three professional bluegrass gospel groups—The Sullivan Family, The Maharreys, and Jerry and Tammy Sullivan, all from interconnected roots, plus country singers Shelby Lynn, Allison Moorner, and Ty Herndon. There is also any number of talented instrumentalists, frequently described as "good enough to be in



*Historic Founder's Hall makes an impressive backdrop for contestants at the Tennessee Valley Old time Fiddlers' Convention.*

Nashville" who choose to stay at home and play at local venues. The Frankville Fiddler's Convention helps keep them in shape.

At the other end of the state is a very different sort of fiddlers' convention, the Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention (TVOTFC), which takes place on the first Friday and Saturday in October. It is a revival of the Limestone County contests, particularly the popular convention held at the Athens Agricultural High School begun in 1924 and lasting through 1936. Newspaper accounts of those events attest to eight hundred people crowded into the auditorium with hundreds being turned away for lack of room. One group that got its start at this convention was the Delmore

Brothers, who became Grand Ole' Opry performers and recording artists in the 1930s.

When Bill Harrison and others restarted the convention in the mid-1960s, they were greeted by large and enthusiastic crowds and decided to move it to the campus of Athens State University where it has grown into an event of major proportions and raises significant amounts of scholarship money for the university. A cadre of well-qualified judges and sizeable prize money draws contestants from across the country. Starting at 7:00 on Friday night and going all day Saturday until close to midnight, the convention features competitions for beginning, junior and senior fiddlers as well as a special

category called "Classic Old-Time Fiddler" for those with a more archaic style of playing. During the course of the convention a steady stream of harmonica players, mandolinists, bluegrass and old-time banjo players, dulcimer players, singers, guitarists, old-time and bluegrass bands and buckdancers take the stage one after the other with few breaks.

TVOTFC draws 15,000 to 20,000 visitors to the campus each year. Some intently watch the competitions; some never get near the stage as they choose to listen to informal jam sessions found in every nook and cranny of the campus. They partake of grilled hamburgers, camp stew and other foods cooked on-site by school booster organiza-

tions and may peruse more than a hundred arts and crafts booths. Crowds especially gather around the booths selling used string instruments. Folks from out of town fill the city's motels or stay in RVs parked on an open field on campus. Athenians turn out in large numbers, too; the convention plays a part in the family traditions of many Athens residents. Like the Frankville convention, TVOTFC has the feel of a reunion, though it is a reunion of musicians and music lovers from geographically widespread locations who make an annual pilgrimage to the revered convention.

The Frankville Fiddler's Convention and the Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention are at different ends of the spectrum. Between them lies a wonderful assortment of events. There's the Fiddle Fest held on the third Friday and Saturday in August in Moulton. More than a contest; it also celebrates the induction each year of a well-known fiddler into its Hall of Fame. In Tuscaloosa, McFarland Mall hosts a fiddlers' convention on the third Saturday in February. This convention is one of several established by retired journalist John Callahan in the early 1970s when shopping malls were the new community gathering places. In Dothan Landmark Park, a living history farm, hosts the local fiddlers' convention as part of Spring Farm Days on the third Saturday in March. In Atmore on the third Saturday in July, fiddlers gather at

## THERE MAY BE A FIDDLERS' CONVENTION NEAR YOU

McFarland Mall Fiddlin' and Bluegrass Contest  
Tuscaloosa  
Third Saturday in February  
205-759-4796

Old-Time Fiddlers' Convention in Dothan  
Third Saturday in March  
Landmark Park: 334-794-3452  
[www.landmarkpark.com](http://www.landmarkpark.com)

Frankville Old Time Fiddler's Convention  
Third Saturday in April  
Ernest Goldman: 251-754-9270

Fyffe Masonic Lodge Fiddlers Convention  
Saturday before the 4th Sunday in June  
Dennis George: 256-996-6916  
Kenneth Boggs: 256-638-2242 (w) or 638-3010 (h)

Atmore Old-Time Fiddlers Convention  
Third Saturday in July  
Atmore Chamber of Commerce: 251-368-3305

Moulton Fiddle Fest  
Third Friday and Saturday in August  
Carl Terry: 256-974-1689  
[www.bffp.net/moultonfiddlers](http://www.bffp.net/moultonfiddlers)

Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention  
First Friday and Saturday in October  
Athens State University  
Rick Mould at 256-233-8215  
[www.athens.edu/fiddlers/](http://www.athens.edu/fiddlers/)

The Alabama Folklife Association is compiling a list of Alabama fiddlers' conventions to post at [www.alabamafolklife.org](http://www.alabamafolklife.org). Organizers are invited to provide information about conventions not listed here. Please call 334-242-3601 or e-mail [joycecauthen@charter.net](mailto:joycecauthen@charter.net) to do so.

Escambia County High School for a convention sponsored by the Rotary Club which supports its Academic All-Star Scholarship program. On Sand Mountain the Fyffe Masonic Lodge has established a fiddlers' convention in a music-rich area that once abounded in them. Now in its third year, the event takes place on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday in June.

We can no longer find fiddlers' conventions in every little community in Alabama, but there are a good number of them across the state. Those wanting to hear good fiddle music, to join a jam session or to have an opportunity to get up on stage and receive applause for their skill and hard work can find a convention within easy traveling distance. Fiddlers' conventions bring musicians together to learn from each other and connect them with audiences whose encouragement keeps them going. They introduce young people to music they might not hear at home and give them opportunities to perform. In short, they are vital in keeping Alabama's fiddling and string band traditions strong. ■



Photo by Joyce Cauthen

*A contestant in the Beginning Fiddler category at TVOTFC and his accompanist.*

*Joyce Cauthen is the author of **With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old Time Fiddling in Alabama**. She has served as director of the **Alabama Folklife Festival** and produced a number of recordings of traditional music, including **Possum Up a Gum Stump: Home, Commercial and Field recordings of Alabama Fiddlers**; **Jesus Hits Like the Atom Bomb**; **John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers of Bessemer**; and **In the Spirit: Alabama's Sacred Music Traditions**. She is also the executive director of the **Alabama Folklife Association**.*



# NATURE and CULTURE

## Documenting Alabamians in Their Natural Environment

by Anne Kimzey

The following photos are from two exhibits produced by Anne Kimzey of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture. The first, *Water Ways: The Traditional Culture of Alabama's River Systems*, began touring to schools and museums in March of 1998. The second, *In the Garden: Traditional Culture and Horticulture in Alabama*, began touring in January 2002. Both exhibits resulted from statewide documentation projects, involving research, interviews and photography. The two projects were funded by the Alabama

State Council on the Arts and the Folk and Traditional Art Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. Both exhibits are now online and can be accessed at [www.traditionalculture.org](http://www.traditionalculture.org). The exhibits are available for booking through the Alabama Humanities Foundation Resource Center at (205) 558-3980 (contact: Cheryl Temple) or the Alabama Center For Traditional Culture at (334) 242-3601 (contact: Anne Kimzey).



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*A rope swing is often an indication of a good swimming hole. This spot can be found at Limestone Park on the Little Cahaba River.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Louise Daniels of Demopolis created this scarecrow to frighten hungry birds away from crops.*



*Shannon (left) and Wayne Haggard of Waterloo (Lauderdale County) run trotlines from jump boxes to catch fish in the waters along the Tennessee River.*



*Commercial fisherman Wayne Moore hauls in a slat-box fish trap from Flint Creek, a tributary of the Tennessee River.*



*A third generation waterman, Captain Pat Meyers of Satsuma (Mobile County) works as a riverboat pilot for the Kimberly-Clark Corporation and builds replicas of historic riverboats.*



*A former commercial fisherman who built his own boats, Mike McCarty switched from plywood to aluminum and began building work boats. His business, Silver Ships, is located in Theodore (Mobile County).*



*The weigh-in is the highlight of this bass fishing tournament at Lake Eufaula.*



*At the annual Blessing of the Fleet in Bayou la Batre (Mobile County), shrimp boats gather for an invocation from the Archbishop for a safe and productive season.*

# Water Ways:

## THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF ALABAMA'S RIVER SYSTEMS

Alabama's rivers have long been recognized as among the state's most important natural resources.

The rivers are also significant for their impact on the state's culture.

Long before statehood, Indians used the rivers for trade routes and as sources of food and water. The state's two major river systems, the Tennessee and the Mobile, have determined patterns of settlement and commerce throughout the state's history.

With small dams and waterwheels, the people of this region harnessed the power of streams and rivers to grind corn, saw lumber, and spin cotton. And since 1884, major projects damming rivers to improve navigation and flood control, to produce hydroelectric power and to create reservoirs have had far-reaching effects on the lives of Alabamians.

Today many people still make their living from the water. Many other Alabamians use the state's rivers and lakes for recreation and for community rituals. These ways of life associated with Alabama's waterways contribute an important sense of heritage and regional identity for the people of this state.



*The Davis Ferry near Franklin in Monroe County transports travelers to and from Packer's Bend.*

Photo by Anne Kimzey



*Mussels, once harvested from the rivers to make mother-of-pearl buttons, are now sold for use in Japan's cultured pearl industry. Philip Meadows uses a four-inch ring to make sure this mussel is of legal size.*

Photo by Anne Kimzey



*The Reverend Leo King (left) baptizes Akeyla Holifield in a Perry County creek.*

Photo by Anne Kimzey

# In the Garden:

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND HORTICULTURE IN ALABAMA

People have cultivated the environment in Alabama since prehistoric times. Many Indian land use practices were adopted by early settlers and later immigrants, who also brought their own plants and gardening traditions with them.

Whether the purpose of a garden is to put food on the table or to simply look beautiful, a gardener works in partnership with nature to achieve the desired result. A garden may be the creation of an individual, but often represents a community aesthetic as well. Many of the preferences, beliefs, and practices associated with gardening, and even the plants themselves, are handed down through generations or passed on to those who share an interest.

This exhibit provides a sample of gardening and yard decorating traditions in the state. ■

*Anne Kimzey is a Folklife Specialist for the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*The late Isabel Hill was an avid gardener who spent a lifetime tending 15 acres of Lanark Plantation, her home near Millbrook.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*The technique of pruning plants flat against a wall is known as espalier. A barber by trade, Nelson Malden and his wife Willodean shaped these pyracantha to show their street address.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Alma Bodiford shells peas amidst one morning's harvest of corn, squash, purple hull peas and zucchini.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Cambodian gardener, Kong Phong, grows Southeast Asian plants in his Mobile County garden.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey



*This rabbit is one of several hay bale sculptures on James Byrd's ranch near Forkland.*

Photo by Anne Kimzey



*Georgiana Jenkins' lushly planted garden incorporates manufactured objects such as painted bricks and tires, iron bed frames, wooden shutters and aluminum strips.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Theories abound on the origins of whitewashing tree trunks: to deter insects, to make trees more visible in the dark, to prevent the sun scalding young fruit trees, or to make the landscape look neat and orderly.*



Photo by Anne Kimzey

*Louise Boswell displays two of the more than 700 varieties of daylilies she grows in her garden.*

# THE BLACK BELT FOLK ROOTS FESTIVAL

## A WHOLE CELEBRATION

by Carol Prejean Zippert

Photo by Carol P. Zippert



"It's that time again; We gonna be back on the square this year? It's coming up to August, are we ready? I'm looking for those old timey blues, some fried skins and homemade ice cream." Each year as summer approaches, comments such as these greet me as I encounter local residents down the street, in the post office, grocery stores, churches and various community meetings, signaling that the festival spirit is in the air full force.

The annual Black Belt Folk

*The festival offers activities for the entire family.*

Roots Festival in Eutaw is definitely for everyone. I often view it in the image of a pie. There is a slice for the folk artists, those bearers of the culture who are more than gifted musicians, dancers, storytellers, craftspersons and cooks. In their arts they carry history - experiences that bear the pain and scars of oppression, loss, deprivation and struggle as well as the courage and strength of perseverance, faith, hopefulness and celebration. In their arts they carry the stories of what was important in a people's lives, formations that can never be forgotten. As one person remarked to



Photo by Carol P. Zippert

*Betty Rogers quilts at the Black Belt Folk Roots Festival in Eutaw.*

Photo by Carol P. Zippert



*The Mississippi Traveling Stars.*



Photo by Carol P. Zippert

*The Echo Gospel Singers of Demopolis.*



me: " I don't want my children to have the blues, but I want them to understand where the blues come from. I want them to know what happens in our lives that give us the blues."

Embedded in my mind is the remarkable story told by a white oak basketweaver who related to a group of children an experience from his own living: " We had to cut the tree, strip the bark, wet and dry the strips then make the baskets to pick cotton on land that wasn't ours." The silent and wide-eyed children focused on Mr. Bailey's hand movements as he crafted a basket from the white oak strips and from the jewels of oral history.

Mr. Lemon Harper, from Sumter County, is a senior citizen "buck dancer." Lemon Harper explains why he dances: "When I hear that moan from the harmonica, my feet will start to tapping and that strain will ignite my whole body. I feel that story blowing from the mouth harp and I just got to dance it." To watch Mr. Harper dance is to witness each movable body part seemingly responding to different rhythms simultaneously.

Barbecue at the festival brings together the closeness and familiarity and carefree-for-the-moment gaiety of any backyard family cookout. At the festival cook-out one finds the greens, peas, cornbread, pies and cakes, all delights folk routinely prepare at home but become special treats in the flavor of the festival. "I come back every year for the homemade ice cream," one pleased festival goer speaks for thousands. From the moment she sets down her churners, Mrs. Sarah Duncan's ice cream booth is never without a line of folk waiting to treat their palates. Each reach for a cup inevitably brings a sigh of, "Oh I remember when..."

The homeliness of the Black Belt Folk Roots Festival lifts the lat-

tice of blues and gospel in the lives of downhome folk. As I have heard it expressed, " We moan the drudgery of our lives through the blues on Saturday and we moan our own repentance through ole timey gospel on Sunday." The festival's program patterns this sequence.

Another slice of the festival pie goes to the people of the West Alabama region. Calendars are marked well in advance for family reunions, class reunions, church homecoming, and vacation time, all to coincide with the weekend of the annual festival. The workers arrive early on Saturday to lay out tables and chairs for artists and vendors. And the local folk are right there, milling on the grounds and fueling the already warm embers of festivity. The



Photo by John Zippert

*Mariah Wilson makes a basket.*



Photo by Carol P. Zippert

*Larry Fulgham cooks barbecue.*

musical program never starts before 11 am, but the chairs under the tent fill by 9 am. Even the rare rainstorm has not deterred the gathering. Folk simply squeeze together toward the center of the tent, until the summer storm has passed. It's the people's festival and they don't give it up.

Each year a piece of the pie is reserved for those faithful who travel to Greene County on predictably the hottest week end of the summer just for the festival. They were hooked after their first experience. Early in the year before the festival, they write; they call, assuring that nothing is changed, the festival will be here. They come, bringing family and friends. They acknowledge their own arrivals pointing out to the festival coordinators that they were here last year and the year before and the year before that.

Perhaps there would be no pie to carve without the commitment of those who plan and produce the festival each year. This slice of pie draws from the ingredients of the other slices. The festival planning group is principally composed of folk artists, local community and a brand new slice of young people. They meet and sketch; they gather and create; they

lay out and produce. And from all this come a schedule of activities, brochures, souvenir program books, advertisements, tents and banners, stages and sound systems, tables, chairs, barbecue grills, deep fryers and snow cone machines. And there you have it, a downhome celebration.

A still brand new slice of the festival pie is the involvement of the young people in designing the Children's Stage -all the activities are for the interest of youth. They no longer have their activities relegated to a little space on the blues stage or the gospel stage, they have their own stage to create and celebrate their way. They merge the old with the new with African dancing and drumming, storytelling, face painting and rap poetry and break dancing. Whether they name it as such, they are making culture.

Another slice of the pie is reserved for the supporters of the festival. Alabama State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, private foundations, corporate sponsors, local businesses, county government and individual contributors have at one time or another given financial or comparable support to the production of the annual Black Belt Folk Roots Festival.

The whole pie of the festival was first produced in 1975 in Eutaw, Greene County. It was conceived on the Eutaw Campus of Miles College



Photo by Carol P. Zippert

(left to right) Viola McGee, Sarah Duncan and Sarah Brewer make ice cream.

by Jane and Hubert Sapp, folklorist and director, respectively, of the Eutaw Branch. When the Branch was closed in 1982, a local group of supporters formed the Society of Folk Arts & Culture, a non-profit organization which continues to sponsor the festival.

The festival is designed to pay tribute to the folk artists recognized as the bearers of the culture who possess the skills, talents and resources that are reflective of the culture and traditions of the region.

Saturday brings the blues musicians, dancers, jug blowers, hambone slappers, crafts and traditional foodways. The Children's Stage is celebrated on Saturday.

Martha James and Robert Hines display okra at the Greene-Sumter Agricultural Co-op table.

Sunday features old timey gospel. The annual festival is held the fourth Saturday and following Sunday in August on the old courthouse square, center of town in Eutaw, AL.

It is a community celebration and an enjoyable serving of pie. ■

*Carol Prejean Zippert and her husband John, are co-publishers of the Greene County Democrat newspaper. Carol holds a BA degree in English-Journalism from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, a MA degree in Rural Sociology from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge and a PhD in Educational Leadership Supervision and Curriculum Development from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Carol serves on the board of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. She is also a published poet who often conducts poetry and other creative writing workshops for youth and adults.*



Photo by John Zippert

# A SAMPLING OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EVENTS IN ALABAMA

The following calendar lists events that are either community traditions themselves, or feature examples of folk art and culture in Alabama.

## First Monday

First Monday of each month and preceding Saturday and Sunday  
Courthouse Square, Scottsboro (Jackson County), Dawn to dusk  
Contact: (256) 574-3100, ext. 237  
A long-running tradition in Scottsboro, these trade days offer antiques, crafts, new and second hand items for sale.

## Collinsville Trade Day

Every Saturday  
1016 Hwy 11 S., Collinsville (DeKalb County)  
4:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
(256) 524-2536 or (256) 524-2127  
[www.collinsvilletradeday.com](http://www.collinsvilletradeday.com)  
At this 160-acre flea market, one can find art, collectibles, plants, produce, traditional foods, house wares, clothing and more.

## Santuck Flea Market

First Saturday of each month (March through December)  
7300 Central Plank Road, Hwy. 9, Santuck (Elmore County)  
(334) 567-7400  
Vendors and customers gather to trade on first Saturdays. An ever-changing variety of new and used merchandise is available.

## FEBRUARY

### Capitol Rotunda Singing

Saturday before the first Sunday in February  
Rotunda of the State Capitol Building, Montgomery  
Contact: (334) 242-3601  
An all-day singing that uses four of the shaped-note books published in Alabama. These are: *Sacred Harp* (1991 Denson revision), *Christian Harmony* (1994 revision), *Sacred Harp* (1992 Cooper revision), and *the Colored Sacred Harp*.

## Mardi Gras

Tuesday before Ash Wednesday  
Mobile  
[www.mobile.org/mardigras.html](http://www.mobile.org/mardigras.html)



photo by Anne Kinzey

*Mardi Gras, Mobile*

According to legend, Mardi Gras in Mobile dates back to 1830 when a group of revelers paraded through the streets with cowbells and rakes. The Cowbellion de Rakin Society became the first of many mystic societies, who now hold masked balls and more than 25 parades during Carnival season. At this pre-Lenten celebration, parade goers are showered with candy, beads, Moon Pies and doubloons thrown from passing floats.

## McFarland Mall Fiddlin' and

Bluegrass Contest  
Third Saturday in February  
Tuscaloosa  
Contact: (205) 759-4796

## Heritage Arts Festival

Last Saturday in February  
Old Courthouse, Downtown Square, Monroeville  
Contact: (251) 743-3359  
Cultural celebration of crafts, quilts, woodworking, soul food, dance performances, and gospel music.

## MARCH

### Rattlesnake Rodeo

First weekend in March  
Kiwanis Building and Covington County Arena, Andalusia  
Saturday 8 a.m. – 9 p.m.  
Sunday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Admission Charged  
Contact: Tammy Weeks  
(334) 493-9559  
The annual Opp Jaycees Rattlesnake Rodeo has been a crowd-pleasing event for more than 40 years. Snake shows, arts and crafts, food and music provide entertainment for all ages.

### Spring Farm Day

Third Saturday in March  
Landmark Park, Dothan  
Admission Charged  
Contact: (334) 794-3452  
[www.landmarkpark.com](http://www.landmarkpark.com)  
The centerpiece of this event is the Old Time Fiddlers' Convention, in which musicians compete for prizes. There are also demonstrations of traditional springtime farming practices, such as sheep shearing and plowing and planting activities.

## APRIL

### Baldwin County Strawberry Festival

Second weekend in April  
Municipal Park, Loxley (Baldwin County)  
Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: Carolyn McDaniel  
(251) 964-5091ss or (251) 550-2003  
Annual event includes food vendors, arts and crafts, strawberry shortcake, Battle of the Bands competition and other entertainment.

Crawfish Festival  
Third weekend in April  
Intersection of U.S. Hwy. 80 and Ala.  
25, Faunsdale (Marengo County)  
Admission Charged  
Contact: John or Barbara Broussard  
(334) 628-3240  
Annual festival features crawfish  
foods, arts and crafts. Live music pre-  
sented until midnight (Cajun, coun-  
try, and rock bands).

Frankville Old Time Fiddler's  
Convention  
Third Saturday in April  
Frankville  
Contact: Ernest Goldman  
(251) 754-9270



photo by Stephen Graubinger

*Sculling Race, Festival on the Rivers, Geneva*

Geneva Festival on the Rivers  
Fourth weekend in April  
Geneva (Geneva County)  
Robert Fowler Memorial Park  
Admission Charged  
Contact: Alice Faye Smith  
(334) 684-6582  
Located on the Pea and Conecuh  
Rivers, Geneva celebrates its river her-  
itage with contests such as sculling,  
worm fiddling and canoe races. A  
greasy pole climb, road race, arts and  
crafts vendors, food, music, and a  
gospel sing fill the weekend.

## MAY

Poke Salat Festival  
First weekend in May  
Downtown Arab (Marshall County)  
Free Admission  
Contact: (256) 586-3138  
Activities include poke salat cook-off,  
womanless beauty pageant, crafts,  
food and entertainment.

Huntsville Sacred Harp Singing  
Saturday before the First Sunday in  
May  
Burritt on the Mountain, Monte Sano  
Mountain, Huntsville  
Contact: David Ivey, (256) 881-5291  
All-day *Sacred Harp* (Denson book)  
singing is held in the Madison  
Church building. Visitors are wel-  
come to share in this shape-note  
singing tradition.

Blessing of the Fleet  
First Sunday in May  
Bayou La Batre (Mobile County)  
St. Margaret Catholic Church,  
13790 S. Wintzell Avenue  
11 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Contact: (251) 824-2415  
Festivities center on the annual cus-  
tom of blessing the shrimp fleet for a  
season of safe fishing and a produc-  
tive harvest. Visitors and locals alike  
enjoy the decorated boats as they  
parade up the bayou. On the church  
grounds are contests, food and activi-  
ties that celebrate the local seafood  
industry.

Dixie Bluegrass Gospel Fest  
Mother's Day weekend  
Sullivan Family Homeplace, St.  
Stephens (Washington County)  
Admission Charged  
Contact: Margie Sullivan,  
(251) 246-4553  
The Sullivan Family band sponsors  
this annual bluegrass gospel event.  
Camper hook-ups and catfish suppers  
are available.

## JUNE

Hank Williams Festival  
First weekend in June  
127 Rose Street, Georgiana  
(Butler County)  
Friday 9 a.m. – 11 p.m.  
Saturday 9 a.m. – 11 p.m.  
Contact: (334) 376-2396  
A tribute to famous country singer  
and Butler County native Hank  
Williams, this festival features country  
music, crafts and food.

Freedom Creek Blues Festival  
First Saturday in June, noon until sundown  
Old Memphis, near Aliceville

(Pickens County)  
Admission Charged, Free Parking and  
Camping  
Contact: The Alabama Blues Project  
(205) 554-1795  
[www.willie-king.com](http://www.willie-king.com)  
This Blues festival is organized by  
blues musician and community  
activist Willie King and held on his  
Pickens County farm. Visitors come to  
hear favorite regional blues perform-  
ers and to eat local barbecue.

National Sacred Harp Convention  
Thursday, Friday and Saturday before  
the third Sunday in June  
Trinity United Methodist Church,  
1400 Oxmoor Rd., Birmingham.  
Call to confirm location.  
Contact: Buell Cobb (205) 901-1715  
Sacred Harp singers from across the  
nation gather annually for three days  
of singing and fellowship.

City Stages  
Father's Day weekend  
Linn Park, Birmingham  
Admission Charged  
Contact: (205) 251-1272  
This three-day, large scale festival  
offers a variety of music, dance, food,  
and crafts. The Alabama Sampler  
Stage features traditional music of  
Alabama.

Alabama Blueberry Festival  
Third Saturday in June  
Jefferson Davis Community College,  
Brewton, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Contact: Judy Crane or Brande  
Agerton, (251) 867-3224  
Annual outdoor festival features blue-  
berries, blueberry foods and cookbooks,  
arts and crafts and entertainment.

Peach Festival  
Fourth week of June  
Clanton (Chilton County)  
Contact: Richard Davis  
(205) 755-6740  
Annual celebration of local peach  
growing industry includes beauty  
pageants, parade and peach auction.

Masonic Celebration  
Fourth week of June  
Florala  
Contact: Betty Hargrove

(334) 858-6430.

Promoted as the oldest Masonic Celebration in the U.S.

Week of events includes a horseshoe tournament, fishing tournament, 5K run, antique car show, parade, street dance, arts and crafts and fire department water battle.

Fyffe Masonic Lodge Fiddlers Convention  
Saturday before the fourth Sunday in June  
Fyffe (DeKalb County)  
Contact: Dennis George  
(256) 996-6916  
Kenneth Boggs  
(256) 638-2242 (w) or 638-3010 (h)

## JULY

World Championship Domino Tournament  
Second weekend in July  
Andalusia, Kiwanis Community Center, So. Bypass  
8 a.m. until completion  
Contact: David Darby, (334) 222-8825

Capital City Shape Note Singing  
Third Thursday of July  
St. John's Episcopal Church,  
113 Madison Avenue, Montgomery  
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.  
Contact: (334) 242-3601  
This event bring singers together from four of the hymn book traditions in Alabama: *Christian Harmony*, *The Colored Sacred Harp*, and the Denson and Cooper Revisions of *The Sacred Harp*.

Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo  
Third weekend in July  
Dauphin Island  
5 a.m. Friday – 5 p.m. Sunday  
Admission Charged (participants only)  
Contact: Mobile Jaycees  
(251) 471-0025

The Mobile Jaycees sponsor this annual event, reported as the nation's largest saltwater fishing tournament.

Atmore Rotary Club Old Time Fiddlers Contest  
Third Saturday in July, 5 – 10 p.m.  
Escambia County High School,

1215 S. Presley St., Atmore  
Contact: (251) 368-3305  
Old-time, string band music competitions and barbeque cookoff.

W.C. Handy Music Festival  
Last week of July  
Florence  
Contact: (256) 766-7642 or 1-800-472-5897  
Weeklong celebration of the musical heritage of Northwest Alabama honoring Florence native W.C. Handy, known as "Father of the Blues." Free events are scheduled throughout the Shoals area.

## AUGUST

Fiddle Fest  
Third Friday and Saturday in August  
Moulton Mini Park next to Lawrence County High School, Moulton  
Friday 6 -10 p.m.  
Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.  
Admission Charged  
Contact: Carl Terry, (256) 974-1689  
[www.bffp.net/moultonfiddlers](http://www.bffp.net/moultonfiddlers)  
Bluegrass music, buck dance and music competitions, arts and crafts.

Black Belt Folk Roots Festival  
Fourth weekend in August  
Courthouse Square,  
Eutaw (Greene County)  
Saturday 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
Sunday 2 – 7 p.m.  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: Carol Zippert (205) 372-0525  
Annual community festival highlights traditional crafts, foods, and music from west Alabama. Fine examples of African-American quilting, pine needle basketry, and more, are for sale. Music stage presents blues on Saturday and gospel on Sunday.

Okra Festival  
Last Saturday in August  
Burkeville (Lowndes County)  
Annie Mae's Art Place,  
278 Harriet Tubman Road  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: (334) 324-7222  
Annual Community Festival features gumbo, okra and other regional foods. Local blues musician Sonny

King performs. Gospel and freedom songs are also presented. Local vendors and artists.

## SEPTEMBER

Festival on the Farm  
weekend after Labor Day  
Friday 5 p.m. and Saturday 1 p.m.  
Home of Gary Waldrep,  
Kilpatrick (DeKalb County)  
Admission Charged  
Contact: Gary Waldrep (256) 561-3908  
Award-winning banjo player and Grammy nominee Gary Waldrep hosts his annual bluegrass festival in early September on his 80-acre farm. A native of Sand Mountain, Waldrep hopes to preserve and promote the musical heritage of his region. Waldrep turns his front porch into a stage where a number of bluegrass and gospel bands perform at this two-day event.

Idler Mule Days  
Labor Day Monday  
Idler Town Park (DeKalb County)  
Free Admission  
Contact: (256) 657-4184  
Idler's rural heritage is on display at this community festival. Visitors can enjoy livestock shows, a mule pull, horse pull, antique tractors and farm equipment, entertainment and food.

Silverhill Heritage Festival  
Third Saturday in September,  
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Silverhill (Baldwin County)  
Intersection of State Hwy.104 and Baldwin Co. Hwy. 55  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: (251) 945-5198  
This celebration of the community's Czech and Swedish heritage features ethnic foods, arts and crafts, pony and train rides, and other entertainment.

Trail of Tears Commemoration Festival, Motorcycle Ride and Pow Wow  
Third weekend in September  
Waterloo (Lauderdale County)  
Free Admission  
Contact: 1-888-FLO-TOUR or (256) 764-3237  
[www.al-tn-trailoftears.org](http://www.al-tn-trailoftears.org)

Billed as the "Largest Motorcycle Ride of the South" an estimated 100,000 or more bikers gather to remember the removal of southeastern tribes to the West. The ride, which starts in Chattanooga, stops in the Northwest Alabama town of Waterloo for a Native American Pow Wow.

#### Foggy Hollow Bluegrass Gathering

Fourth weekend in September  
Webster's Chapel

Friday 6 p.m. until,  
Saturday noon until.

Admission Charged

Contact: David Boley (256) 492-9080  
Semi annual event. Both national and local bluegrass bands perform on stage at this farm halfway between Gadsden and Anniston off Highway 431. Camping and RV hookups are available.

#### Maharrey Homecoming

Fourth weekend in September

St. Stephens Historical Park,  
St. Stephens

4 – 10 p.m.

Admission Charged

Contact: Jean Parnell (251) 247-2622

An annual bluegrass gospel singing featuring the hometown Maharrey Family bluegrass band and other musical guests.



*Mule Day, Winfield*

#### Mule Day

Last Saturday in September  
Winfield

Downtown

8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Contact: (205) 487-4281

Annual event includes mule and horse judging, a parade, a reenactment of the battle at Mule Crossing, arts and crafts, music, flea market and food.

#### Collinsville Annual Quilt Walk

Fourth weekend in September

U.S. Hwy 11, Collinsville

Admission Charged

Contact: Vanessa Chambers (256)

524-2788 or (256) 524-3296

[www.collinsvillequiltwalk.com](http://www.collinsvillequiltwalk.com)

Vintage and contemporary quilts are on display during this annual tour of historic homes and churches.

#### Old Alabama Town Storytelling Festival

Fourth Saturday in September

Old Alabama Town, Kiwanis Park,  
Montgomery

10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Contact: (334) 240-4617

Hear noted storytellers from around the state. Festival also features arts and crafts, children's activities and food.

## OCTOBER

#### Tennessee Valley Old Time

Fiddlers Convention

First Friday and Saturday in October

Athens State University, Athens

Admission Charged

Contact: Rick Mould (256) 233-8215

[www.athens.edu/fiddlers/](http://www.athens.edu/fiddlers/)

Billed as the oldest and largest fiddlers convention in the U.S., this festival draws musicians and old-time music lovers from across the country.

#### Tale Tellin' Festival

Second weekend in October

Pickard Auditorium, Selma

Admission Charged

(334) 875-7241 or 1-800-45-SELMA

Selma, home of Alabama storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham, is the location for this event, which presents ghost stories and other tales by nationally-known story tellers.

#### Sullivan Family Homecoming

Third weekend in October

Sullivan Family homeplace,

St. Stephens (Washington County)

Admission Charged

Contact: Margie Sullivan

(251) 246-4553

The Sullivan Family hosts this annual gathering of bluegrass gospel performers, food and fun. Camper hook-ups are available.

#### George Washington Carver Sweet Potato Growers Association Arts and Crafts Festival

Third Saturday in October

Town Square, Tuskegee

Contact: V.A. Kahn (334) 727-8320

or (334) 727-4551 Call to confirm

Event features a sweet potato competition (all sweet potatoes entered must be grown, not purchased), arts and crafts competition, music, sweet potato pies and sweet potato ice cream.

#### Kentuck Festival

Third weekend in October

Saturday and Sunday

Kentuck Park, Northport

9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Admission Charged

Contact: Kentuck Museum Association, (205) 758-1257

[www.kentuck.org](http://www.kentuck.org).

Annual festival features 300 artists and craftspeople, including traditional, self-taught, and contemporary. Two music stages.

#### Alabama Gourd Festival

Third weekend in October

Civic Center, Cullman

Saturday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sunday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Admission Charged

Contact: Shirley McEwen

(256) 737-5006 Call to confirm

[shirley@alabamagourdsociety.org](mailto:shirley@alabamagourdsociety.org)

Annual festival features gourd arts and crafts, such as birdhouses, musical instruments and decorated gourds. Dulcimer band performs.

#### German Sausage Festival

Fourth Saturday in October,

Elberta (Baldwin County)

Town Park

8 a.m. – 6 p.m.

No Admission Charged

Contact: David McWatters

or Charlie Haupt (251) 986-5805

[www.elbertafiredepartment.com](http://www.elbertafiredepartment.com)

This semi-annual event celebrates the town's German heritage, especially its German sausage and sauerkraut. Other offerings include entertainment, arts and crafts booths, petting zoo and carnival rides.

Oneonta Covered Bridge Festival  
Fourth weekend in October  
Palisades Park and downtown  
Oneonta (Blount County)  
Contact: (205) 274-2153  
This festival, which celebrates an architectural landmark in the county, features a golf tournament, quilt show, art and crafts, music and food.

Wiregrass Heritage Festival  
Fourth weekend in October  
Landmark Park, Dothan  
Admission Charged  
Contact: (334) 794-3452  
Demonstrations of traditional farming practices, such as cane syrup making, wood carving, split-oak basket making, broom making, quilting, herbal lore, working with oxen and mules, peanut stacking and picking. A music stage features a variety of local and regional talent including bluegrass, country and gospel music. Also featured are an antique engine show and visits to the two-acre pumpkin patch.

Williams Station Day  
Fourth weekend in October  
Atmore (Escambia County)  
Atmore Community Center  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: Emilie Mims (251) 368-3305  
Visitors to this annual heritage festival can take in logging and mule pulling demonstrations, folk arts demonstrations, a juried art show and non-juried craft show, entertainment and food.

Syrup Soppin' Days  
Last Saturday in October,  
Loachapoka Park, Loachapoka  
(Lee County)  
7 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: Larry Justice (334) 887-7683  
The trademark of this community festival is its cane syrup made the old-fashioned way, by mule-powered cane mill. In addition, live music, arts and crafts, and plenty of biscuits round out the event.

## NOVEMBER

National Peanut Festival  
Late October through mid November  
U.S. Hwy 231 S., Dothan

Admission Charged  
Contact: (334) 793-4323  
Annual fair presenting agriculture of the region, which includes livestock and horticultural exhibits and competitions, recipe contests, crafts, carnival rides, pageants and peanut-themed parade.

Thanksgiving Pow Wow  
Thanksgiving Thursday and Friday  
Poarch Creek Indian Reservation  
(Escambia County)  
opens 9 a.m.  
Contact: (251) 368-9136, ext. 2216,  
community relations



photo by Almee Schmidt

*Thanksgiving Pow Wow, Poarch Creek Indian Reservation.*

Annual event, sponsored by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians includes dance competitions, inter-tribal dancing, the crowning of the princess, traditional foods and crafts.

## DECEMBER

Christmas on the River  
First weekend of December  
Public Square and City Landing,  
Demopolis  
No Admission Charged  
Contact: Chamber of Commerce  
(334) 289-0270  
A week-long celebration that culminates in a nautical, parade of boats

decorated with lights and a fireworks display.

Christmas on the Coosa  
Second Saturday in December  
Gold Star Park, Downtown  
Wetumpka  
Contact: (334) 567-1313  
Christmas-themed celebration of arts and crafts, food, quilt show, street parade (day), lighted boat parade on the Coosa (evening) followed by a fireworks display.

Guntersville Boat Parade of Lights  
First Saturday in December  
Lurleen Wallace Drive, Guntersville  
6 p.m.  
Contact: (256) 582-3625  
At this annual event, spectators watch from shore as boats decorated with Christmas lights parade by on the lake.

Las Posada Festival  
Internacional  
Second Saturday in December  
Alabama Museum of Natural History,  
Tuscaloosa  
Free Admission  
Contact: (205) 348-7550  
A Latin American festival dramatizing Mary and Joseph's arrival in Bethlehem. The celebration includes Latin foods, music and dance.

*For more information on these and other cultural events, contact the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel at 1-800-ALA-BAMA or [www.800alabama.com](http://www.800alabama.com).*



# *Alabama's Council on the Arts*

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Alabama State Council on the Arts is to promote Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and educational experiences.

## The Agency

The Alabama State Council on the Arts is the official state agency for the support and development of the arts in Alabama. It was established in 1966 by an act of the Alabama Legislature. The agency supports not-for-profit arts organizations, programming in the arts for the general public, and individual artists. The State Arts Council works to expand the state's cultural resources and preserve its unique cultural heritage and places a high priority on arts programming by and for schools. The Council's primary means of supporting the arts and making the arts more accessible to varied audiences is through a multi-faceted grants program which covers all disciplines and fields of creative expression.

## The Council

The fifteen members of the Council are drawn from communities throughout the state. They are appointed by the Governor for six-year terms, and selection is based on expertise in the arts, business, or community affairs. The officers of the Council are elected by its members.

The Council meets four times each year, at various locations throughout the state. It approves agency programs and policies, develops long range plans, and makes final decisions on state and federal grant dollars under its jurisdiction.